

# One for my love, by Hugh Murphy

Hayes lay slouched over the bodies of his recently deceased wife and child. He knew that their killer stood before him but he cared not and paid him no attention, instead he hopelessly tried to tend to his family's fatal wounds which at this stage had already transpired into death. Becoming tired of being ignored the slaver kicked Hayes onto his back and placed a blade against his throat. "At least let me bury them...please" Hayes spouted out weakly. The Boss spoke in his pure tone "Hmm killing you would be a mercy" as he spoke large, black birds circled the area, their vacant, black eyes set on Hayes' dead wife. "And besides" The Boss said with a toothed grin "The crows need food too" effortlessly he picked up the weakened man and tied him to a pole with a rusted chain, forcing him to watch his wife and son, both bereft of life as crows began to peck at their bodies. It would be many days before Hayes was released from his entanglement.

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Frigid, white snowflakes bled into the thin fabric of Hayes' military fatigues sending shivers of freezing pain throughout his body which was only worsened by the raging torrent of wind that swept through the beleaguered building in which he was stationed. The time had come to cleanse the city of the terrorists which had conquered it so many years ago, a hideous malignancy that had spread its roots until the city was consumed in whole by its wrath, they were a repulsive group of slavers and raiders who had used the war in Europe to their advantage in order to capture the settlement with little resistance, and to sell its residents into slavery, including Hayes and his family.

Upon waking Hayes was greeted by his patrol unit consisting of twenty men tasked with assassinating the slaver leader, known only as "The Boss". Next to Hayes sat Private Eustace, a young, inexperienced boy who had been drafted into the European army, he never said much but the look in his eyes was enough to know he would rather be anywhere else. In many ways he reminded Hayes of his own son and for that he felt obliged to comfort him, he too had lost everything the day the terrorists attacked, and he too watched his family die at the hands of "The Boss". "How'd you say you were going to kill the boss again?" Eustace asked, Hayes smiled as he retrieved two pistols from his satchel, he pointed one in the air, wiggled it and cocked it "One for my baby" he then cocked the other pistol "One for my love" Hayes pointed both guns at Eustace's head and made a crude gunfire noise with his mouth "Bits a brain everywhere" Eustace smiled at his remark "Now that I'd like to see". Hayes pulled two cigars from his trench-coat pocket and handed one to Eustace, in surprise he looked up at Hayes "really?" he said excitedly. "Sure!, you're a man now aren't you? Could you just fetch my lighter, it's in the crate". Excitedly Eustace crawled over to the crate and began rummaging around, Hayes smiled "Just be careful of the-". But it was too late Eustace had tripped over the flare setting it off into the night's sky, Hayes watched it erupt in splendiferous beauty, a beauty that would mean their end, their position had been given away! He turned to Eustace tears were welling in the boys frozen face, he cried out "I'm so sorr-" before his final word was uttered Eustace's head exploded into red paste, decorating the snow with blood and fragments of bone. Hayes sat in shock and disbelief as his men were gunned down around him, their blood forming a thick red mist with the blizzarding snow. By now the night sky was purpling into dawn thus revealing dozens of silhouetted figures on the horizon. As the figures drew closer it was clear they were taking the survivors as prisoners-if they wanted to kill them they would've done so much sooner. Before the men came any closer Hayes tucked his two pistols neatly into his boots, as soon as he was

finished they were upon him, quickly he and his men raised their arms in submission. The slavers rushed through the opening of the building and thrust their crude weaponry at the soldiers signifying that retaliation would be met with a swift end. From the hole also sprung out a colossal, hideous man, his tiny, screwed eyes were almost hidden under the folds of his gangrenous skin, his jaw jutted out at such an angle that it appeared it would fall out at any moment, and his teeth seemed more suited to that of a feral, cannibalistic creature which, in many aspects he was. The Colossus lumbered over to Hayes' direction and kicked the still-twitching body of Eustace, he smiled deeply to himself taking pride in his fowl act "Mah shots gettin' betta" his remark was followed by hoots of praise from his comrades. Rage fumigated through Hayes, he could've taken out his pistols and punctured a hole through the giant's thick skull but he was smarter than that and had no plans to die a martyr, not yet anyway.

Hayes and his remaining squad were led down a narrow street to what appeared to be the city centre, or what was left of it. A couple of men guarded an entrance through a chain-link fence, one of which held a massive, feral dog by a thick metal chain, the beast gargled and whined at Hayes and the other interlopers, cancerous growths protruded from the creature's mangy fur-an offset of the severe radiation no doubt. Again Hayes was pushed beyond the gate revealing a large, rusted bunker.

The inside of the bunker was hot and clammy, you could feel the moisture escaping your mouth after every exhale which made the men's situation even more panic-ridden. Slowly they were led unto a large throne-room, in its centre sat a throne forged from molten skulls and bones, atop it sat a gigantic pulsating man. If Hayes was angry before now he existed in an entirely new dimension of hatred and malice, it was him.. "The Boss". "Greetings gentlemen, you're just in time for my big reveal" The Boss spoke with a surprisingly sophisticated demeanour, which was not common for the slaver-type, if not for his intimidating appearance he would make a convincing butler or wealthy man. Quickly he rose from his throne revealing his grand height of seven feet, truly, a living monster. Gradually The Boss trudged over a metal-railing bridge behind his throne, on either side of this bridge lay two gaping holes, two bottomless pits that seemed not to end until the depths of hell. "was he to throw us off?" Thought Hayes, but no the monstrous man continued to a small computer terminal, nonchalantly he hammered down on a large red button which sounded a boisterous alarm that rung throughout the bunker, even his own men stared on in surprise as two massive nuclear warheads emerged from the abyss below him. With the pressing of another button the flaming thrusters underneath both missiles began to erupt in a brilliant wisp of blue flame. "Now the last of those untouched by the flames of atomic war shall be swayed by them!". Even the Boss' own son, a young boy no older than ten looked upon his father in disbelief at his madness. "YOU'RE CRAZY" yelled Hayes "Those bombs have remained isolated for a hundred years; they'll explode within a day". The Boss began laugh, he raised his right arm underneath the thrusters blue flame and watched his hand sizzle and char in its intense heat, a testament to his own insanity. "Better to live one day a lion than a hundred years a sheep". At this point the bunker descended into chaos, the colossus who had captured Hayes yelled out "NO!, I ain't taking that chance of dying today" and with that he charged to the computer terminal before being halted by The Boss. The Boss grabbed him by the head and smashed his face against the metal railing, taking the Colossus and half of the bridge with him. This was his chance; Hayes leapt up and kicked The Boss over the ledge. At this point the throne room was empty of life, the smart had ran away whilst the foolish stayed and had fought amongst each other until they were all dead. Hayes was about to go to the terminal to see if the nukes could be disabled when he heard a rustling behind him. Quickly he brandished his two pistols, twisted and aimed them at the noise. It was The Boss' son, cowering in the corner of the room; this was his chance, his chance to avenge the death of his son. Taking the pistols he directed them at the whimpering boy's head, he was

about to fire when he looked into the boy's eyes, they were just like his son's, bright green emeralds of innocence. With a heavy sigh he lowered his weapons "If I pull this trigger then I am no better than your father...now go, get outta here" hurriedly the young child hopped to his feet and sprinted out the bunker door.

It was hopeless, after minutes of toying with the computer terminal it was clear that the nuclear launch was irreversible, he couldn't let this missile fire, he couldn't let any more families be separated, there was only one option, a last resort Hayes hoped he would not have to come to. Slowly he raised his left pistol, cocked it and pointed it toward the right nuke's thruster, "One for my baby" as he was raising his right pistol The Boss crawled from the railing screaming at Hayes to stop, he pointed his right pistol it at the left nuke's thruster. With a heavy regretful sigh he whispered out "One for my love" and fired both his pistols. A single tear dripping down his face was the last this he felt before he and The Boss were consumed by blinding heat.